A FREE RESOURCE FOR LISTENERS OF THE SIMPLE AND SMART SEO SHOW

The Simple and Smart Content Playbook for 2026

Eighteen plays for getting chosen — not merely found.

You do not need to publish constantly or appear on every platform. You need a simpler system: create genuinely useful content, connect it to a business goal, distribute it where the right people will see it, and look for evidence that it is helping the business grow.

Crystal Waddell

SIMPLE AND SMART SEO

AISEOSKOOL.COM

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WHAT'S INSIDE

The eighteen plays

01 I Start With the Business Goal—Not the Content Calendar

02 I Add Something AI Cannot Pull From Every Other Website

03 I Build a Recognizable Brand—Not a Random Collection of Keywords

04 I Help Businesses Build Assets They Own

05 I Let AI Handle the Blank Page—Not the Final Judgment

06 I Use the 80/20 Principle as a Guide

07 I Keep an Evidence Bank

08 I Give AI Clear Voice Boundaries

09 I Teach One Clear Movement at a Time

10 I Give People Value Before Asking for a Click

11 I Repurpose Ideas—Not Identical Pieces of Content

12 I Build a Content Flywheel

13 I Participate Where Trusted Recommendations Happen

14 I Measure Proof of Useful Visibility

15 I Measure Whether People Find the Business—and Choose It

16 I Monitor AI Visibility Without Treating It as a Perfect Ranking

17 I Ask Customers How They Found Me

18 I Review the Entire Marketing Ecosystem

My Simple and Smart Content Standard

You Do Not Need More Content. You Need More Useful Content.

UNDER $10K A MONTH

You are still building the system. Work these plays with people doing the same thing inside **AI SEO Skool**.

JOIN AT AISEOSKOOL.COM

$10K–$50K A MONTH

You have traffic and sales. Find what your product data is hiding — **book a catalog audit**.

BOOK AT SIMPLEANDSMARTSEO.COM

INTRODUCTION

Content marketing has changed.

Small business owners are no longer competing only against the business down the street, the Etsy shop with more reviews, or the Shopify store with a bigger marketing budget. We are now competing for attention in search results, social feeds, AI-generated answers, online communities, podcast platforms, email inboxes, and recommendation networks.

At the same time, AI has made it incredibly easy to publish generic content.

That does not mean small businesses should stop creating content. It means we need to become much more intentional about what we create, why we create it, and how every piece supports the business.

I have experienced these changes from several perspectives. I have built my own product-based business, driven thousands of visitors from Pinterest to Etsy and Shopify, hosted the Simple and Smart SEO Show, coached creative entrepreneurs, and helped small local businesses improve how they appear online.

Through that work, I have learned that a small business does not need to publish constantly or appear on every platform.

> We need a simpler system: create genuinely useful content, connect it to a business goal, distribute it where the right people will see it, and look for evidence that it is helping the business grow.

Here is the content playbook I recommend for small local businesses, Etsy sellers, and Shopify store owners in 2026.

1. I Start With the Business Goal —Not the Content Calendar

Before I recommend creating a blog post, podcast episode, video, or social post, I want to know what the business is trying to accomplish.

I ask questions such as:

- What do you want your business to be known for?
- Who are you uniquely qualified to help?
- What questions are your customers asking?
- What product or service do you most want to sell?
- What should someone understand or do after consuming this content?
- How will this content support a larger business goal?

SEO should support the business. It should not become a separate project that produces rankings and traffic without producing customers.

This is something I regularly reinforce inside the AI SEO Skool: your business goals come first and your SEO goals come second.

Every page should have a job.

One page might introduce your business to people searching for a service in your city. Another might answer a question that keeps a potential customer from buying. A product guide might help a shopper choose the right option. A case study might prove that you can deliver the result someone wants.

What this looks like for different businesses

For a local lawn service, content might answer:

- How often should a pasture be mowed?
- What affects the cost of pasture mowing?
- Do you offer pasture mowing near Fayetteville or Raeford?
- What should a property owner do before the crew arrives?

For an Etsy seller moving to Shopify, content might explain:

- Why Etsy traffic does not automatically transfer to Shopify
- What needs to be rebuilt during an Etsy-to-Shopify transition
- Why owning an email list matters
- How Shopify collections and product filters work and do I have enough products to support them?
- Do I have a taxonomy for my store so that Google and AI understands what I sell?

For a photographer, content might target:

- Event photographers in a specific city
- What is included in an event photography package
- How far in advance clients should book
- What makes a photographer the right choice for a particular type of event

The topic changes, but the strategy does not: create content that helps the right customer make a decision.

I call this creating an SEO strategy that helps you get chosen—not merely found.

RESOURCE SEO Optimization Strategies for Entrepreneurs

IF YOUR BUSINESS IS DOING $10K A MONTH OR LESS

Bring your real business into AI SEO Skool and work the plays with us.

Play 1 is easy to nod at and hard to do alone. Inside the Skool you name the goal, pick the page that carries it, and get feedback from people building the same kind of business you are.

No templates. No guesswork.

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2. I Add Something AI Cannot Pull From Every Other Website

AI can quickly summarize information that already exists online. It can explain what a meta description is, generate a generic list of local SEO tips, or produce another article about moving from Etsy to Shopify.

What AI cannot independently recreate is my experience.

It cannot recreate:

- The questions my customers ask
- The problems I have solved
- The experiments I have conducted
- The screenshots I have collected
- My conversations with podcast guests
- My client results
- My original systems
- The mistakes I made in my own business
- The conclusions I reached after doing the work

This is where small businesses have an advantage.

We may not have the publishing budget of a large company, but we are much closer to the customer. We hear their questions. We see where they become confused. We know what happens before, during, and after a purchase.

That firsthand knowledge is valuable content.

An example from my own Shopify store

A generic article could explain that Shopify filters use product data.

My stronger article explains what happened in my actual Collage and Wood store. For a long time, my collections did not have useful filters (i.e., Category Entry Points) because information such as occasion, audience, material, and format had not been stored consistently.

I initially thought filters were primarily a theme feature. They are not. The organization a customer sees are the result of the product data behind the store.

322

Once I recognized the larger issue, I developed a structured product taxonomy and took my catalog from 322 feed and taxonomy errors to zero.

That is not information I collected solely by reading other articles. It is something I learned by identifying and solving a real problem inside my own business.

RESOURCE Why Your Shopify Filters Don't Work—or Don't Exist

An example for a local business

A local business can apply the same principle without conducting a formal research study.

A landscaper could share:

- What caused a project to cost more than expected
- The difference between mowing a lawn and mowing a pasture
- Before-and-after photos
- Seasonal maintenance observations
- Questions customers should ask before hiring someone
- Local soil, weather, or property conditions that affect the work

A photographer could explain why a particular venue requires different lighting or planning.

A contractor could show what was hiding behind a damaged wall and explain how the problem was corrected.

A financial professional could explain a mistake they repeatedly see local business owners make.

This is information gain in practical terms: I add something to the conversation that comes from real work, not merely from summarizing what has already been published.

3. I Build a Recognizable Brand— Not a Random Collection of Keywords

Keywords still help us understand what people are searching for, but I do not want to build a website that looks like a disconnected list of search terms.

I want search engines, AI platforms, and potential customers to understand:

- Who I am
- What I do
- Who I help
- Where I work
- What I have experience doing
- What topics I can credibly discuss
- Why someone should trust me

For Simple and Smart SEO, I consistently connect my name and brand with topics such as:

- Small business SEO
- Local SEO
- Shopify strategy
- Ecommerce product data
- Pinterest
- AI-assisted visibility
- Etsy-to-Shopify transitions
- Creative entrepreneurship
- The Simple and Smart SEO Show

For a local business, the connections might include the owner's name, company name, services, service area, customer reviews, professional credentials, community involvement, and examples of completed work.

For a Shopify store, they might include the founder, product categories, materials, occasions, customer types, brand story, press mentions, and product expertise.

I reinforce these connections through:

- A descriptive About page
- Consistent business information
- Author biographies
- Service and product pages
- Customer reviews
- Relevant internal links
- Podcast appearances
- Local citations
- Structured data
- Google Business Profile
- Helpful articles
- Videos and images
- Third-party mentions

In my conversation with Garrett Sussman about AI search and Shopify, we discussed how every helpful article, video, profile, and podcast appearance gives a business another opportunity to be found and understood.

That is how I think about modern visibility. Each asset is another signal that helps people and machines understand what the brand represents.

RESOURCE AI Search, Shopify and the New Rules of SEO

4. I Help Businesses Build Assets They Own

My belief in owning digital assets comes directly from my experience as an Etsy seller.

I learned how to drive significant traffic from Pinterest to Etsy. But when potential customers arrived, Etsy displayed my competitors on the same pages I had worked so hard to promote.

I was building traffic, but I did not control the customer experience.

That realization led me to build my own Shopify store. My site eventually began attracting approximately 10,000 clicks per month.

I did not stop recognizing the value of Etsy or Pinterest. I simply stopped treating one external platform as the entire business.

The same lesson applies to small local businesses relying exclusively on Facebook.

A Facebook page can be helpful, but it is not a complete digital presence. The business does not control the platform, the algorithm, the layout, or how consistently followers see its posts.

I encourage small businesses to invest in assets they own or directly control:

- Their website
- Their domain
- Their email list
- Their customer relationships
- Their original photos
- Their written content
- Their podcast
- Their product and service information
- Their business processes
- Their first-party customer data

Social media, Etsy, Google Business Profile, Pinterest, and other platforms can help people discover the business. Ideally, those platforms should lead people toward a stronger ecosystem the business controls.

I share more of my own Etsy-to-Shopify experience on my Simple and Smart SEO About page.

IF YOUR BUSINESS IS DOING $10K–$50K A MONTH

Book a catalog audit and find out what your product data is hiding.

You already own the traffic and the sales. The next gain is usually structural: occasion, audience, material, and format stored consistently enough that Google, AI, and shoppers can all tell what you sell.

I took my own store from 322 errors to zero.

BOOK AT SIMPLEANDSMARTSEO.COM

5. I Let AI Handle the Blank Page —Not the Final Judgment

I use AI, and I believe it can make content production much more efficient.

But I do not believe the best use of AI is asking it to create hundreds of articles without meaningful human involvement.

I use AI to help with work such as:

- Organizing podcast transcripts
- Creating an initial outline
- Grouping keywords by search intent
- Identifying repeated questions
- Suggesting headings
- Formatting information
- Creating content variations
- Drafting metadata
- Turning a longer conversation into smaller content ideas
- Identifying sections that need a clearer explanation

Then I add the part my audience actually needs from me:

- Experience
- Context
- Verification
- Judgment
- Examples
- Strategy
- Encouragement
- A realistic next step

My rule is simple:

> I let AI help me move faster, but I do not let it replace the expertise my customer came to me for.

6. I Use the 80/20 Principle as a Guide

I use the 80/20 idea as a production guideline, not a rigid formula.

AI AND AUTOMATION CAN HELP

- Structure
- Formatting
- Transcription
- Summarization
- Categorization
- Variations
- First drafts
- Metadata
- Repurposing

I RESERVE MY TIME FOR

- Original insights
- Customer understanding
- Fact-checking
- Business strategy
- Personal stories
- Case studies
- Editing
- Recommendations
- Final decisions

This matters because small business owners have limited time.

A local business owner should not spend three hours formatting an article when that time would be better spent photographing a completed job, collecting a customer testimonial, or explaining something only an experienced professional would know.

The purpose of AI is not to remove the business owner from the content. It is to remove some of the friction that prevents the business owner's knowledge from becoming content.

7. I Keep an Evidence Bank

Most business owners do not need to invent more expertise. They need a better way to capture the expertise their work is already producing.

I recommend creating a simple evidence bank containing materials such as:

- Customer questions
- Reviews and testimonials
- Before-and-after photos
- Google Search Console screenshots
- Shopify analytics
- Pinterest results
- Google Business Profile insights
- Podcast transcripts
- Client wins
- Common objections
- Troubleshooting notes
- Email results
- Product-development decisions
- Processes and checklists
- Experiments that failed
- Experiments worth repeating

This does not need to be complicated. A shared folder, spreadsheet, project-management board, or notes database can work.

The work is already happening. The evidence bank makes it easier to use.

How one project becomes multiple pieces of content

My Shopify taxonomy project can support content about:

- Why Etsy-to-Shopify migrations lose product structure
- How metafields affect collection filters
- Why inconsistent attributes hurt discoverability
- How product data supports Google Shopping
- What I learned correcting 322 errors
- How to develop a product taxonomy
- Why a business should pilot a new system on one collection
- Which filters shoppers actually need (or don't)

A local business could do the same thing with one completed project.

One landscaping job might become:

- A before-and-after post
- A pricing FAQ
- A video explaining the equipment used
- A seasonal maintenance article
- A customer testimonial
- A Google Business Profile update
- A checklist for preparing a property
- An email featuring the finished result

The work is already happening. The evidence bank makes that work easier to turn into useful content.

$10K A MONTH OR LESS? START YOUR EVIDENCE BANK WITH US

You already have the expertise. AI SEO Skool helps you get it out of your head.

Members bring one real project — a completed job, a store fix, a customer question they keep answering — and leave with the article, the post, and the next step.

The work is already happening.

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8. I Give AI Clear Voice Boundaries

I do not want my content to sound as if it was generated from the same prompt as everyone else's.

Simple and Smart SEO content should be:

- Friendly
- Conversational
- Clear
- Specific
- Jargon-free
- Practical
- Encouraging
- Honest about complexity
- Family-friendly
- Focused on a useful next step

I avoid vague, inflated phrases such as:

- “Delve into”
- “In today’s ever-changing digital landscape”
- “Game-changing”
- “Revolutionize”
- “Unlock the power of”
- “This changes everything”
- “This always works”

I also avoid making promises the evidence cannot support.

Before publishing, I ask:

Would I explain this the same way to a business owner sitting across from me?

If the answer is no, I rewrite it.

9. I Teach One Clear Movement at a Time

Many of the people I help are already overwhelmed.

They are running businesses, serving customers, raising families, learning new technology, and trying to make good decisions with limited time.

My content should make them feel more capable—not remind them of 47 things they have not completed.

That is why I try to teach in this order:

01 Explain what is happening.

02 Show why it matters.

03 Give a real example.

04 Identify the smallest useful next step.

05 Use the result to decide what comes next.

In my Shopify filter article, I do not tell readers to begin by restructuring an entire catalog.

I suggest starting with one collection.

Choose a collection that is difficult to browse. Add consistent product data to those items. Activate appropriate filters. Then observe what shoppers do.

If people use the filters, the business has evidence that expanding the project may be worthwhile. If they do not, the owner has tested the idea without spending a month reorganizing the entire store.

This is how I approach sustainable improvement: one informed movement at a time.

10. I Give People Value Before Asking for a Click

Not every social post should hide the answer behind a link.

I believe in giving people complete, useful information where they already are.

A zero-click post might:

- Answer one question
- Correct one misconception
- Demonstrate one step
- Explain one part of a process
- Share a meaningful result
- Help someone avoid a mistake

The website, podcast, service, or offer can provide deeper support.

For example, I could publish a LinkedIn post explaining:

> Shopify filters are not primarily a theme setting. They are the visible result of the product data behind your store.

I could then give a brief example using occasion, audience, or material metafields.

The reader learns something useful without leaving LinkedIn. Someone who recognizes that they have a larger catalog problem can visit the full article or learn about an audit.

A local business can do this too.

An HVAC company could explain one sign that a system needs professional attention. A landscaper could show how to identify an overgrown area that requires different equipment. A photographer could share three details that improve event photos.

Useful content builds trust before the sales conversation begins.

11. I Repurpose Ideas— Not Identical Pieces of Content

Repurposing does not mean copying the same caption onto every platform.

I begin with one strong source and identify the individual ideas inside it.

One Simple and Smart SEO podcast episode might become:

- A complete blog article
- Two YouTube clips
- A LinkedIn opinion post
- A practical email
- A carousel
- A Pinterest graphic
- Three FAQ answers
- A quote graphic
- A discussion prompt for the AI SEO Skool
- A downloadable checklist

AT $10K–$50K A MONTH, THE CATALOG IS USUALLY THE BOTTLENECK

A catalog audit tells you which filters shoppers actually need.

I will show you where your catalog stands: product data, collection structure, category entry points, and the filters worth turning on first — reviewed and prioritized.

Start with one collection.

BOOK AT SIMPLEANDSMARTSEO.COM

For example, my conversation about AI search and Shopify could generate separate content about:

- Why quality clicks matter more than traffic alone
- What query fan-out means
- How Shopify stores can become easier for AI systems to understand
- Why brand authority matters
- Whether keywords are really dead
- How podcast appearances contribute to visibility

The podcast episode is the source material. Each platform receives the idea that best matches how people use that platform.

12. I Build a Content Flywheel

I want content creation to become easier as the business gains experience.

A sustainable content flywheel might look like this:

01 I record a podcast conversation, complete a client project, or solve a real business problem.

02 I identify the strongest lesson.

03 I publish the complete explanation on my website.

04 I adapt individual insights for email and social media.

05 I collect the questions and reactions those posts generate.

06 I use those questions to improve the article or create the next piece of content.

This keeps my content connected to real people and real work.

It also prevents me from constantly staring at an empty calendar and wondering what I should post.

13. I Participate Where Trusted Recommendations Happen

Some of the most valuable discovery cannot be tracked perfectly.

Someone may learn about a business through:

- A podcast guest
- A private Facebook group
- A LinkedIn conversation
- A local networking group
- A community event
- An AI SEO Skool member
- A conference
- A friend's text message
- A screenshot shared privately
- A ChatGPT answer
- A referral from another business owner

I sometimes refer to these untracked or difficult-to-track conversations as dark social.

The answer is not to appear everywhere. I would rather choose the communities where my customers and professional peers already exchange recommendations.

For a local business, this may mean neighborhood groups, chambers of commerce, local Facebook communities, referral partnerships, schools, churches, or civic organizations.

For a Shopify or Etsy business, it may mean maker communities, podcast audiences, industry groups, Pinterest, email, YouTube, or professional collaborations.

My goal is to become a helpful, recognizable participant—not a content machine dropping links into every available conversation.

ONE OF THOSE ROOMS, IF YOU ARE UNDER $10K A MONTH

AI SEO Skool is where the recommendations actually happen.

Small business owners, Etsy sellers, and Shopify store owners trading what worked this month — plus the prompts, checklists, and plain-language answers that keep the work moving.

Come be a recognizable participant.

JOIN FREE AT AISEOSKOOL.COM

14. I Measure Proof of Useful Visibility

Traffic matters, but it is not the only evidence that content is working.

I look at a balanced group of signals:

- Search impressions
- Qualified website traffic
- Branded searches
- Email subscribers
- Calls and contact-form submissions
- Product or service inquiries
- Conversion rate
- Sales
- Profitability
- Repeat customers
- Podcast growth
- Reviews
- Referrals
- Mentions and backlinks
- AI citations or recommendations
- Customer feedback

I care about profitability—not revenue alone.

A piece of content can attract a large audience and still fail to contribute meaningfully to the business. Another piece might attract only 50 people, but five of those people may be qualified prospects.

I want visibility that moves the business toward the owner's definition of success.

15. I Measure Whether People Find the Business—and Choose It

I separate visibility metrics from business results.

SIGNAL	WHAT I AM TRYING TO LEARN
Impressions	Is the business appearing?
Clicks	Does the result earn attention?
Engagement	Is the content useful or interesting?
Leads	Is the right person raising their hand?
Sales	Is visibility producing revenue?
Profit	Are those sales financially worthwhile?
Retention and referrals	Did the experience create lasting value?

This distinction prevents me from treating a traffic increase as an automatic business success.

The Simple and Smart SEO website includes examples of this difference. Jamie Trull describes SEO bringing the right people—people ready to buy—into her funnel. Photographer Jo Hayes describes receiving calls from out-of-state event coordinators who found her through her website and SEO.

Those are more meaningful outcomes than an isolated ranking report.

RESOURCE Simple and Smart SEO Client Results

16. I Monitor AI Visibility Without Treating It as a Perfect Ranking

I periodically test questions a potential customer might ask an AI platform:

- Who helps Etsy sellers move to Shopify?
- Who provides Shopify SEO help for creative businesses?
- What are the best SEO podcasts for entrepreneurs?
- Who helps small businesses with local SEO near Fayetteville?
- How can I improve my Shopify product taxonomy?
- What resources explain SEO in plain language?

I record:

- Whether my brand appears
- How accurately the platform describes me
- Which pages or sources it cites
- What topics it associates with me
- Which competing brands appear
- Where my digital presence may have gaps

AI results can vary by platform, user, location, account, and timing. I therefore treat this as a directional brand audit—not a fixed ranking that everyone will see.

17. I Ask Customers How They Found Me

Analytics cannot fully capture podcast influence, private recommendations, cross-device journeys, AI answers, or the accumulated effect of seeing a brand several times.

I recommend adding an open-ended question to inquiry, booking, or checkout forms:

> How did you first hear about us?

I may also ask:

> Was there anything you read, watched, or heard that helped you decide to contact us?

The first question helps identify where discovery began. The second helps identify the content that built enough trust for someone to take action.

A customer might first hear about the business from a friend, listen to three podcast episodes, read a blog post, and finally search for the brand by name.

The final branded search did not create the entire relationship. It was simply the last visible step.

18. I Review the Entire Marketing Ecosystem

I no longer expect every individual blog post, email, podcast episode, and social post to prove its value in isolation.

Instead, I look at how the pieces work together.

I ask:

- Is qualified visibility increasing?
- Are more people searching for the business by name?
- Are inquiries becoming better aligned?
- Are customers mentioning the podcast or content?
- Is the email list growing?
- Are local calls and direction requests increasing?
- Are product pages converting?
- Are we relying less heavily on one platform?
- Are sales and profitability improving?
- Is the system becoming easier to maintain?
- Does the business owner feel more confident and in control?

One channel may introduce the business. Another may build trust. A third may give the customer a reason to act.

A channel does not have to close the sale by itself to contribute to the sale.

THE CHECKLIST

My Simple and Smart Content Standard

Before I publish a piece of content, I ask:

- [ ] Does this support a real business goal?
- [ ] Does it answer a question my customer actually has?
- [ ] Have I added something from my experience?
- [ ] Can someone understand it without an SEO dictionary?
- [ ] Have I supported factual claims with reliable evidence?
- [ ] Is there a clear and realistic next step?
- [ ] Can this idea be adapted into another useful format?
- [ ] Do I know what result I will look for?
- [ ] Does it sound like me?
- [ ] Does it help the right person see why they should choose this business?

You Do Not Need More Content. You Need More Useful Content.

The purpose of a modern content strategy is not to publish as much as possible.

It is to turn what we already know—our experience, customer conversations, completed projects, systems, results, stories, and point of view—into content that helps the right people understand us and trust us.

For a local business, that might mean answering the questions customers ask before calling.

For an Etsy seller, it might mean documenting the process of building a brand beyond the marketplace.

For a Shopify store, it might mean transforming product knowledge and customer data into a better shopping experience.

AI can help us organize, draft, and distribute those ideas. But our expertise, experiences, relationships, and judgment are what make the content valuable.

That is the real opportunity in 2026: not to out-publish AI, but to use it intelligently while creating the kind of content only a real business owner, practitioner, or expert could create.



I am Crystal Waddell — Shopify store owner, host of the Simple and Smart SEO Show, and the person behind the plays in this playbook. Everything here comes from work I have actually done.

SIMPLE AND SMART SEO · RAEFORD, NC

YOUR NEXT STEP

Pick the door that matches where your business is right now.

One informed movement at a time.

DOING $10K A MONTH OR LESS

Join AI SEO Skool.

Work these eighteen plays with feedback, prompts, and a community of small business owners, Etsy sellers, and Shopify store owners building the same thing you are.

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DOING $10K–$50K A MONTH

Book a catalog audit.

You have proof that people find you. Let us make sure they can choose you: product data, taxonomy, collection structure, and the filters your shoppers actually need — reviewed and prioritized.

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The Simple and Smart SEO Show

New episodes on the plays in this playbook — real stores, real numbers, plain language.

You do not need more content.
You need more useful content.

WHERE TO FIND ME

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